

Using Songs in Enhancing the Teaching of Grammar

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Abstract

This paper shares research and studies done in using songs to teach grammar from the theoretical and practical perspectives. The theoretical part focuses on the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) and the practical part focuses on techniques in using songs in classrooms.

Introduction

The teaching of grammar has always been an important concern in the teaching of English as a Foreign and Second language generally (Mukundan & Roslim, 2009). Using songs in the teaching of grammar in language classrooms is said to have many advantages. For instance, they entertain and relax the learners while they are learning or practicing a structure, they often eliminate the students' negative attitude towards learning and through providing authenticity and context they make the grammar points more understandable and easy (Saricoban & Metin, 2001).

Theoretical perspectives

Theoretically, the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) has been the most referred to when it comes to using songs in language teaching and learning. This hypothesis explains that for optimal learning to occur the affective filter must be weak. A weak affective filter means that a positive attitude towards learning is present. If the affective filter is strong the learner will not seek language input, and in turn, not be open for language acquisition (Schoepp, 2001). Similarly, Shen (2009) shares the same view of the Affective Filter Hypothesis with regard to using songs. Using English songs in EFL classrooms can

successfully bring about affective learning through providing a harmonious classroom atmosphere, reducing students' anxiety, fostering their interests and motivating them to learn the target language. Students will regard English songs as part of entertainment rather than work and thus find learning English through songs amusing and relaxing.

Practical perspectives

Practically, using songs benefits teachers and learners in all phases of teaching and learning grammar. However, it is essential to consider the age, interests of the learners and the language being used in the song while selecting a song (Saricoban & Metin, 2000). For example, approaches taken in using songs among children would be different from those used for teenagers and adults (Harmer, 2004). Since most children enjoy singing fun lyrics, using easy children songs will be useful. Furthermore, choosing lively action songs through which they can dance or act while singing will ensure a lively atmosphere. For teenagers or adults in the intermediate or advanced level, it is better to use more meaningful or popular songs (Saricoban & Metin, 2000).

The internet access to music, lyrics and activities has made it easier for teachers to effectively use songs in the classroom (Schoepp, 2001). For instance, they are available on http://www.lyrics.com and http://www.songlyrics.com as in Ahola (2005). However, it should be kept in mind that songs which provide frequent repetitions, or tell a story, or provide comments about life, or introduce cultural themes, are the effective ones, since they provide authentic and meaningful material (Saricoban & Metin, 2000).

There are several techniques that can be used with songs in the classroom and it mainly depends on the creativity of the teacher. A teacher's selection of a technique or a set of techniques should be based on his or her objectives for the classroom.

Saricoban & Metin (2000) propose some techniques as follows:

- Gap fills or close texts
- Focus questions
- True-false statements
- Put these lines into the correct sequence
- Dictation
- Add a final verse
- Circle the antonyms/synonyms of the given words
- Discuss

Upendran (2001) proposes the following in the teaching of phrasal verbs using the song "Another Day in Paradise" by Phil Collins:

- Students are provided with incomplete lyrics.
- Students are asked students to fill in the blanks.
- Students are asked to volunteer information.
- Students are asked the meaning of phrasal verbs.
- Students are provided with contextual clues.
- Students are asked to study the lyrics again.

Through this activity, Upendran (2001) concludes using songs provides an ideal context for students to learn new phrasal verbs. The enthusiasm generated by songs will enable the teacher to discuss those phrasal verbs, which have been brought up by the students, and not those randomly selected by the teacher or the textbook writer. Making students learn the songs will ensure that they will remember not only what each phrasal verb means but also how it should be used.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this paper which mainly compiles issues in using songs to teach grammar from the theoretical and practical perspectives will provide some insights for teachers to make the learning of English a little different than the usual classroom activities.

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